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# Archie's Old Desk





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**THE OLD DESK.**

1489. - 2000







# Autchie's Old Desk.

BY

SARAH DOUDNEY,

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TIMES SEVEN," ETC., ETC.



London:

SUNDAY SCHOOL UNION, 56, OLD BAILEY, E.C.

1872.

1480. f 578

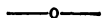


Butler & Tanner,  
The Selwood Printing Works,  
Frome, and London.



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# ARCHIE'S OLD DESK.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE CLIVES.

NDEED, Archie, it would be folly to spend money on a new desk, when this will answer your purpose quite well."

"But, mother, it is such a hideous old thing: it was Uncle Tom's sea-going desk for years and years. The lock is broken, and the hinges are shaky."

"Lock and hinges can easily be repaired. And really, Archie, I am sure that this old desk will stand more wear and tear than one of modern construction, such as you wish to buy."

Mother and son were sitting together in their small parlour, with the objection-

able desk between them. Looking at it as it stood upon the table, no one could have termed it elegant; and few would have wondered that a lad of Archie's age should desire something less ancient and more ornamental. It was composed of mahogany—good solid wood all through; it was brass-bound, and had substantial brass handles. And instead of stamped and gilded leather or velvet, it displayed, when opened, a surface of faded green cloth, spotted here and there with old ink-stains.

"Well, mother," said Archie dolefully, "I suppose I must take it, as you think it would be extravagant to buy another. But I wish it wasn't quite so frightful. And now I must get some note-paper and envelopes."

"I have already purchased a stock for you," Mrs. Clive replied, without appearing to notice the manifest dissatisfaction in her son's face.

"*Humph*,—plain and cheap enough," he

muttered, as he untied her parcel. "Well, well: the paper is good enough for the desk; and I daresay both paper and desk are good enough for me."

"A great deal too good for you," cried a merry voice at the door. "You are a sad grumbler, Archie." And then in a changed tone, the speaker continued, "He doesn't mean all that he says, dear mamma."

The lad turned quickly towards his mother, and saw that she was in tears. The packet dropped from his hold. The envelopes were scattered over the table; and he hastened to fling his arms around her neck.

"Mother, darling; I didn't intend to grieve you. Indeed I'm not such a hard-hearted, unthankful fellow as I seem; but you are far too kind to me," he said, almost sobbing.

"My dear Archie," she answered, kissing him, "you cannot think how it pains me to practise such strict economy; it looks



almost like stinginess. But our means are very limited ; and I have had to save and scrape to get you a decent outfit."

"And you will pinch yourself for it by-and-by when I am gone. Oh, dear mother !"

"Nonsense," said Edith Clive, resolved to put an end to the scene. "You don't know anything about *my* resources, Mr. Archie ; and I shall take care of mamma, and manage the house while you are away. But now let us have tea ; and after tea, our good neighbour, Mr. Hewitt, is coming to mend your desk. He is a very clever amateur carpenter, you know."

She bustled softly to and fro, as busy as a bee, imparting some of her own cheerfulness to her mother and brother. Few girls of seventeen possessed Edith's quiet tact and consideration for others ; and none could be brighter, or more gleeful with innocent fun. It was a pretty sight to see her setting the tea-table, and taking the *various* household duties as gaily and

naturally as if her heart never ached for the old luxurious days gone by. Only two years ago, she was the daughter of a wealthy man, and folks envied the rich Miss Clive, whose every whim was gratified, and whose path seemed to lie among roses. Then came ruin—sudden and overwhelming. Mr. Clive died, as many others have died, who lacked courage to face a changed world ; and his wife and children were left almost penniless.

They did not remain in the place which had been the scene of their prosperity and misfortune. Acting upon the advice of a faithful old friend, they came to the town of Eastbury ; and the same friend took Archie into his counting-house, until some more lucrative post could be obtained for him. There Mrs. Clive contrived to find a tiny cottage at a low rent, and opened a day-school. The plan succeeded very well, for God helped the widow and the fatherless ; and they bore their reverses patiently and bravely. Their friend, Mr. Benson, at

last succeeded in getting a better situation for Archie,—a clerkship in the office of a rich London firm. And the lad—now eighteen years of age—rejoiced at the prospect of leaving the quiet town, and making his own way in the world.

No relics of their past luxury remained to the Clives. Everything had been sacrificed; jewels, trinkets, treasures, all were gone. The old desk which Archie had despised had been passed by unnoticed, being of small value and containing papers belonging to Mrs. Clive. These papers were utterly worthless, save to their possessor; and she prized them exceedingly. In her sailor-uncle's old desk she had deposited packets of letters received from her husband before their marriage—letters full of faith, and hope, and tenderness, written when life was new. And there was a girl's diary, some withered flowers, and two or three old sonnets which were more precious than silver or gold.

*Poor woman!* it had cost her many a

pang to turn out the contents of that ancient desk; but she had performed the sad task for Archie's sake. It had been hers in her maiden days, her little private store-chamber, always kept sacred from prying eyes. She had not known much of Uncle Tom, the bluff sailor to whom the desk had first belonged. She only knew that it had accompanied him on all his voyages; and when he took the last voyage of all,—over a certain sea which can never be recrossed,—it came into the hands of her mother with several other articles. But while she used it as a casket for her treasures, she thought little about its former history.

Edith's sunny good-humour soon banished the shade from the other faces. Then, too, it was a fair April evening; and there were trees and green fields to be seen from the window, for the Clives' cottage stood on the outskirts of the town. Over the fresh pastures was the bright sky, transparently clear, and flecked here and there with little

clouds tinted softly, like the petals of a rose. The long dark shadows lay sleeping on the sward; the grey tower of an old church was touched with gold by the sinking sun, and the whole scene was pleasant and peaceful. It might have been noticed that Edith's eyes were turned often towards that old tower, and her brother followed her glance.

"I know what you are thinking, Edith," said he. "You are wishing that you could be organist of St. Fabian's, when Mr. Kelly grows too old to play any more."

"How did you guess my thoughts?" she asked, slightly colouring.

"Well, am I not right?" he persisted, laughing at her surprise.

"I confess that you are right. But that is only an idle dream of mine, Archie; it will never be realized."

"Why shouldn't it be realized? Don't I know that Mr. Kelly has been an excellent friend to you? Hasn't he given *you lessons* for nothing; and doesn't he

say you are the most promising pupil he ever taught?"

"Yes, Archie; he says very kind things. But I am sure he has other pupils far more gifted than my poor self; only, you know, I am really in earnest in wanting to make rapid progress, and perhaps they are not."

"I remember that you didn't take so much trouble about your music in the old days," remarked Archie, sighing. "You were always fond of it; but I don't think that in the past times you would have had patience enough to sit in a cold church, practising on the organ, as you did last winter."

"Perhaps not," answered Edith cheerfully. "And that's one of the advantages of being poor; it makes us put out all our energies, and do our very best."

"And another advantage is, that the few friends made by poor folks, are generally true as steel," said Mrs. Clive. "If we had continued to be rich, we should

never have known the worth of such men as Mr. Kelly and Mr. Benson."

"You and Edith always contrive to see the bright side of our circumstances, mother."

"I think, Archie, that many people are prone to forget the brightness which God always sends. He does not mean us to be ever groping in the dark."

By-and-by the pleasant tea-table chat came to an end; and as Archie emptied his cup, he thought of the coming days when mother and sister would be far away. He did not desire to remain in Eastbury; and yet he felt that it would cost him many a pang to say farewell to the humble cottage. Sorrow had drawn the members of this family very near each other; and feelings which might have lain dormant all their lives, if their circumstances had continued prosperous, were now brought into action. The lad remembered all the little sacrifices which *Mrs. Clive* and Edith had made for his

sake; all the quiet home-charities which had made their lowly dwelling an abode of peace and love. And he began to think that his new life would be very desolate without them.

The old clock of St. Fabian's church chimed six; and Mr. Hewitt's knock was heard at the door. He had come to repair the desk.

He set about his task very skilfully; talking all the while about Archie's bright prospects. And long before the shaky hinges were made firm and the new lock put on, young Clive's spirits had risen again; and he went to bed, full of high expectations for the future.







## CHAPTER II.

### ARCHIE'S NEW LIFE.



**T**HREE days after the old desk had been mended, Archie started for London. It was Monday morning; and as the train sped on, leaving Eastbury further and further behind, his heart turned regretfully towards his home. He thought of the bygone Sunday as he caught sight of the tower of St. Fabian's; he recollected the sweet services in the old church, the hymns they had sung, and that faint tremor in his mother's voice as she stood beside him in the pew. And then he *called the* long, earnest talk in the even-

ing, and the counsels that were given to him in those last hours.

“You won’t neglect your Bible, Archie?” Mrs. Clive had said. “And you will ‘remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy’? There are six days for you to ‘labour and do all your work;’—only one day which God asks you to dedicate to Him. Many people consider it a very small sin to break the second commandment, while they would be greatly shocked at the idea of infringing any of the other nine. But, Archie, I hope you will never be induced to forget this law; you must pray that He will incline your heart to keep it. Sunday will be a golden link between you and your home. We shall worship with you in spirit, using the very same words, and putting up the very same petitions. And I think, my boy, that we may expect to receive the very same blessing,—‘the peace of God which passeth all understanding.’”

The old tower was soon hidden from

his sight; even the pleasant hills around Eastbury were no longer visible; but his mother's words were echoing through his mind and bringing the tears into his eyes. They were indeed "words spoken in season;" and Mrs. Clive had silently prayed that they might never be forgotten by him who heard them.

Mr. Benson's nephew had been a clerk in the service of Messrs. Gibbon & Neale for many years. He was a grave, quiet man of four or five and forty, and Mr. Benson knew that he might be trusted to find suitable lodgings for Archie. Mr. John Benson had done what his uncle desired, and had engaged rooms for young Clive in a lodging-house which was tenanted by one of the steadiest clerks in the office. He was assured that Martin Willis would be an excellent companion for Archie, and believed that they would speedily become friends.

Mr. John Benson accompanied Clive to *his new abode*. It was late in the after-

noon when the cab stopped before a respectable-looking house, standing in a terrace in Islington; and Martin Willis met them in the entry.

Mr. John Benson introduced the young men to each other, and then went his way, feeling that he had done all that was required of him. Willis's manner was kind, and he earnestly desired to give his new acquaintance a hearty welcome; but his was a shy nature, and he could not succeed in being so genial as he intended; and Archie mentally decided that his fellow-lodger was a very unprepossessing fellow.

Tea was ready in the sitting-room they were to share together; and poor Martin's clumsy efforts to play the host secretly amused his companion. Archie criticised his awkward bearing and homely features with something like contempt, and wondered why they should have been thrown together. On his part, Willis was not slow to perceive that his advances were

met rather coldly; but he was far too generous to blame Clive.

Martin was only too well aware of his own awkwardness and shyness; and this painful consciousness of his defects served to render them more apparent. Those who were thoroughly acquainted with him knew that a warm heart was beating under that unattractive exterior, and appreciated the true nobility of his character. But, unfortunately, Archie was not keen-sighted; he was one who judged simply from outward appearances, and did not believe in pure gold unless it dazzled his eyes.

And so, when he unpacked his belongings, and took out the old desk in the solitude of his room, he was thinking all the while that he could never make an intimate friend of such a dull, clumsy fellow as Martin. Full of these notions, he sat down and wrote a letter to his mother—a letter which he considered extremely *clever and sharp-witted*. It contained an

exaggerated description of poor Willis's manner and person; and he smiled complacently to think that Edith would laugh merrily over his satire. In this, however, he was greatly mistaken. Gay and light-hearted as his sister was, she had never been known to delight in ridicule; and Archie's letter gave more pain than pleasure to her mother and herself.

As time wore on, he began to grow more accustomed to Martin's ways, although he did not cease to regard him as a very inferior being to Mr. Archibald Clive. Yet he was forced to admit that Willis was a useful person, whose assistance in his office-work was of some value: and he was quite content that Willis should pour out the tea, cut bread-and-butter, and perform sundry little tasks for him which his mother's hands had been wont to do. He liked to be waited upon, and his kind-hearted companion humoured him.

Sometimes he deigned to talk to Martin

of Mrs. Clive and Edith; and his friend always listened with deep interest to these tales of home life in Eastbury. But far oftener Archie entertained him with stories of past grandeur, describing the horses that he used to ride and the fine acquaintances of other days; and then Martin's attention would sometimes wander.

"How slow he is!" Archie would muse, contemptuously; "he can't appreciate my conversation."

He never questioned Willis about his own personal concerns—never asked if he too had a mother or a sister; and Martin was far too shy to volunteer any information. So the talking was generally all on Archie's side.

It was not long before Clive made a new friend in another of his brother-clerks. Arnold Huntlie was remarkably handsome, and had a most winning manner; and these were sure recommendations to Archie's favour. Huntlie could

talk largely about his own doings and of his rich connexions ; and in his company Archie found the time pass quickly enough. Arnold was so clever and amusing, and had seen so much of the world, that his companionship was very delightful indeed.

Gradually Archie began to grow a little irregular in his habits. He stayed out late at nights, and, consequently, rose later in the mornings. And Martin, dull as his companion deemed him, watched him closely, and, in his heart, lamented these signs.

There came a certain Sunday morning when Willis, in his Sunday suit, stood waiting in the sitting-room for his companion. He had taken his own breakfast, but the coffee-pot remained upon the table, and the bells of the neighbouring churches had begun to chime for service. Still Archie did not come ; and Martin knew that he must go to church without him. He was moving towards the door when Clive made his appearance.



He looked pale and weary: there were dark circles round his eyes, and he moved slowly and languidly. Then he dropped into a seat, leaning his arms heavily upon the table, but speaking no word to Martin.



AT BREAKFAST ON SUNDAY MORNING.

Willis gazed at him earnestly; the colour came and went upon his honest, homely face, for he was trying to break

through his usual habit of reserve, and say a few sentences of counsel and warning. Still there was silence, broken only by the chiming of the bells; for the street was very quiet, as London streets often are on Sunday mornings.

"Clive," said his companion at last, "I'm afraid you won't like my saying so, but I wish you'd give up Huntlie."

"You'd better mind your own affairs," returned Archie rudely, "and not meddle with mine."

"I expected a rebuff," replied the other quietly; "and if I followed my own inclinations, Clive, I should say no more. But I know Huntlie better than you do, and it is my duty to warn you against him."

"You're jealous of him, Willis; that's the truth."

Martin smiled. "You may think so, Clive, if it pleases you; but, nevertheless, do not treat my warning lightly."

"If Huntlie were known to be a good-

for-nothing fellow, he wouldn't be retained in our office," said Archie loftily.

"He is related to Mr. Neale's wife," rejoined Martin, "otherwise I believe he would have been dismissed long ago. And now good-bye for the present, for I am going to church."

The door closed behind him, and Archie was left alone. He felt bitterly angry with Martin; his friend had dared to tell him the truth, and he almost hated him for it. Yet, as he sat before his untasted breakfast, his conscience told him that he was taking the downward path; and the voices of the bells seemed to be echoing the still small voice within. He could not bestir himself and go to God's house with an aching head and listless frame; and he began to feel thoroughly miserable in body and mind.

And yet he could not forgive Martin Willis for his plain speaking.



## CHAPTER III.

### EVIL WAYS.

**W**HEN Martin returned from church, he found that Archie had worked himself into a very bad temper; and he therefore deemed it prudent to say as little to him as possible. Their dinner was eaten almost in silence; and then Martin seated himself near the window, prepared to spend the afternoon in quietly reading.

Suddenly he rose from his chair with a very decided expression of annoyance on his face. He had caught a glimpse of Arnold Huntlie ascending the door-steps. Gathering up his books, he left the parlour, and proceeded upstairs to his own chamber.

It would not be profitable to recount

the idle chatter of the two young men downstairs. Once or twice those old words, "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy," drifted into Archie's mind, as he sat laughing at Arnold's silly jokes. But even when Huntlie grew bolder, and used language that was openly profane, he was suffered to talk on unchecked. Archie had not the moral courage to reprove him, and dreaded being likened by his new friend to "that milksop, Willis."

Martin went to evening service alone, for Archie and Arnold had gone out together. And as he walked slowly towards the church on that warm summer evening, the young man's heart was very sad. He had taken a genuine liking to Archie, and would have done anything in his power to serve him. Clive was not the first who had been led by Huntlie into evil courses; Willis had seen one or two others following the tempter along the broad road, and he knew too surely where the path ended. *There had been a time when Arnold had*

even tried his arts upon Martin himself; but he had utterly failed. Martin's strong common sense had detected the worthlessness of his would-be companion, and his lack of vanity had closed his heart to flattery. There were other reasons also why Huntlie's efforts had been in vain. Martin was a quiet, consistent follower of One who has promised that no evil shall happen to His servants while they trust in Him. He was wearing that "whole armour of God," which is such a sure defence against "the fiery darts of the wicked." Alas for Archie! *He* had gone forth into the warfare of daily life with no better protection than his own frail self-confidence; and it was no marvel that the shafts of temptation struck him right and left.

While Martin grieved for poor weak-minded Clive, he did not forget to pray for him. And he prayed for himself too, that the holy armour which he wore might never be laid aside until the fighting days

were done. Then he knew that shield and helmet and sword, would be exchanged for the white robe and golden crown which the Great Captain shall give unto all who have kept the faith. And in the meanwhile, he was wary and watchful, lest at any time he should be smitten, like the king of Israel, "between the joints of the harness."

Weeks passed on, and Huntlie's influence over Archie grew stronger and stronger. Mrs. Clive and Edith wrote long, loving letters, telling him of all the events in their quiet life, and Archie answered them in a matter-of-fact way, giving them no insight into his doings. Sometimes as he sat at Uncle Tom's old desk, hastily filling half a sheet of note-paper, the past would be vividly presented to his mind, and the little cottage parlour would come before him with startling distinctness. He saw his mother's sweet sad face again, and beheld Edith moving *lightly to and fro*; and then his heart

smote him when he contrasted his own life with theirs. But these feelings of self-condemnation soon passed away, and they grew rarer as the months went by. Huntlie had introduced him to the "fast" young men of his own set; and Archie strove to imitate their manners, dress, and conversation. Mr. John Benson observed that Clive was not improving, and wondered if it were his duty to write to Eastbury about the lad, giving his friends a hint that he was going wrong. He came to the conclusion, however, not to interfere; and so things were permitted to take their course.

Archie's associates soon taught him the evil practice of gambling, and many an evening was spent in this way. At first, as is often the case, he won rapidly, and was thus tempted to play for large sums. And then the tide of fortune seemed suddenly to turn against him, and he lost even faster than he had gained. Still he did not take warning, but played on,




hoping to make up his losses; and thus it came to pass that he owed Huntlie a debt of twenty pounds.

Then indeed he paused in his mad career. To him, twenty pounds was a large sum; and if he gave Arnold the money, he must leave other debts unpaid. He was at his wit's end, and mentally resolved that if he could get out of this scrape, he would drop Huntlie's acquaintance altogether.

"I hope you mean to pay me that twenty pounds, Clive," said his companion gruffly. "I am tired of waiting for it."

It was twelve o'clock on an October night, and the two were standing before the door of Archie's lodgings. Already Arnold's manner had begun to change towards his dupe, for he found that there was little to be got from him; and he had some reason, too, for thinking that his power over Clive was on the wane.

"I cannot pay you just yet," answered *Archie* in a low voice.



"So you have said for the last six weeks. Look here, Clive, I want this money, and I mean to have it;—suppose I tell Mr. Neale of some of your doings, and state that you borrowed the sum of me for gambling purposes: how will you like that?"

"You can't do it without implicating yourself," returned Archie wrathfully.

The other gave a scornful laugh. "Oh, Mrs. Neale is my aunt, you know, so I've nothing to fear. But I'm almost tired of the office, and I shouldn't mind quietly leaving; Neale will get me a post elsewhere. But as for you, Clive, you'd better take care of yourself. I'll give you another week, and that's all."

"I don't know what to do!" cried the poor lad in despair.

"Do! Why, let me have your watch, and I'll raise the money."

"No, no; I dare not. It was my father's, and I must not let it go out of my hands."

"Well, there's your sneaking friend Willis, who has professed to take such an interest in your welfare. Can't you borrow of him?"

"I can ask him," said Archie sadly. "Perhaps he won't refuse me; but I haven't used him very well, as you know."

"You've done him no harm, I suppose?"

"Oh no; but I have snubbed him. You didn't like him, Huntlie, and you did your utmost to end the friendship between him and myself."

"Of course I don't like him; he's a low, mean fellow. But he's always saving, and he can afford to lend you the money easily enough. And remember, Clive, that if you don't pay me on this day week, I shall do my worst. Good night."

He went his way; and Archie entered the house with a heavier heart than he had ever carried before. He went upstairs to his room, and soon laid his aching head upon the pillow; but not to sleep. He

---

tossed and turned and moaned aloud in his utter distress; and a voice seemed continually to murmur in his ears the solemn words, "The way of transgressors is hard."

By-and-by the pale dawn stole softly into the chamber, and touched the wan face that was so sadly changed of late. As the grey light crept over him, he thought of the little room at Eastbury, that used to be his, but which was Edith's now. He fancied how the same shadowy ray was resting on her sweet features and closed eyes, until at length it woke her gently from her peaceful innocent sleep. And he knew that ere she left that little room, and went about her daily duties, she would kneel by the bedside and pray for him.

His mother too! how little she guessed all the misery that her erring son was suffering now! He burst into tears, and wept long and bitterly.

Martin met him at the breakfast table,

and cast a compassionate glance at his haggard face. To his surprise, Archie timidly wished him "good morning," and evidently desired to be on friendly terms. Willis was far too kind-hearted to repel his advances; he busied himself in sundry little offices of good-will, and at last remarked,—

"You are not looking well, Clive. You're country-bred, and perhaps London air doesn't suit you."

"I don't feel very bright," Archie admitted; and then added in a shy tone, "I fancy I have been rather too gay lately—keeping late hours, you know. But I mean to turn over a new leaf; and shall not go out to-night."

"I'm heartily glad to hear you say so," said Martin, forgetting his reserve. And the two clerks went into the city together.





## CHAPTER IV.

### A CRIME.



**T**HAT day was Saturday. Archie was true to his resolution and came home to tea with Martin; sitting down when the meal was over, to have a quiet evening.

They talked for some time on various topics; and Archie was once or twice on the point of preferring his request. But it was not easy to ask so great a favour of one whom he had slighted; and he could not bring out the words which were trembling on his lips.

"You must excuse me," said Martin, at last, "if I write a letter." And he went upstairs to fetch his desk.

Archie took up a book and pretended to be absorbed in its contents, but his eyes wandered frequently towards Martin's

desk,—a small, well-worn writing-case, of Russian leather. He saw him take something carefully from a corner, and heard the rustle of crisp paper. He watched more closely, and discovered that Willis was putting two bank-notes into an envelope.

Should he speak now? No; he would wait until the letter was finished. It was a long letter, and it seemed as if it would never be brought to a close. At length he heard the pen making a final flourish, and guessed that the epistle was completed. He was right; Martin folded the letter, sealed and addressed it, locked his desk, and then drew his chair nearer to his friend.

“I am glad my task is done,” he said, cheerfully. “I own I am not fond of writing.”

Archie felt that the moment was come. He glanced round the room, studied the pattern of the carpet, and looked anywhere rather than on his companion's face while *he spoke*.

"Willis," he stammered, "can you lend me twenty pounds? I know I don't deserve any kindness from you, for I've been very foolish of late. But I'm going to mend my ways, and I want to get out of my difficulties."

There was a pause; and when Martin spoke, it was in a low voice.

"I wish it were in my power to help you, Clive; but it is not."

"I know I don't deserve it," Archie repeated dolefully.

"Don't speak of that. I lack the means, not the will, to assist you."

Archie thought of the two bank-notes which Martin had inclosed in the envelope, and felt half-disposed to doubt the truth of his assertion.

"You are sure you can't manage it, Willis?" he asked, with a heavy sigh.

"Quite sure. But it gives me great pain to refuse you."

Again there was silence. Martin was far too delicate to question his friend respecting



those difficulties whereof he had spoken; and Archie did not take him into his confidence. If he had plainly told Willis the whole story, much sin and suffering might have been avoided. Willis would have assured him that Huntlie's threats of exposure were not to be feared, and would have advised him to insist that Arnold should wait until it was convenient for the money to be paid. But the moments slipped away, and nothing more was said.

Then the maid entered with the supper-tray, and soon afterwards they retired to rest.

Archie spent a miserable night: it seemed to him that ruin stared him in the face; for if Huntlie did his worst, how could he hope to retain his situation? Messrs. Gibbon & Neale had the reputation for being very particular about the characters of those whom they employed; and although Mr. Neale was said to be deaf to the tales of Huntlie's misdeeds, he *would not* be equally lenient with other

offenders. And if Archie were dismissed and sent home to Eastbury, his prospects for the future would be very dark and unpromising. Mr. Benson would lose confidence in him, and would be loth to give him the position which he had formerly held. His mother and sister,—what would they say? Such thoughts were not to be endured; he must contrive to stop Huntlie's mouth; he must get the money—but how?

It seemed as if evil spirits gathered round him in the stillness of those night-hours. He did not ask God to help him in his distress, he sought no counsel from Heaven, and the good angels came not to minister unto him. And because the weak heart was left unguarded, those spirits of darkness seized their opportunity and assailed him with their manifold temptations. They reminded him that Martin's room was next to his own, and that on the morrow morning Martin would be gone to church. Would it be so very

difficult to apply his own keys to that Russian leather desk? Perhaps they might not fit the lock; but it was still more likely that they would. He had rather a large bunch of keys in his possession, some of them were useless to him now; they had once belonged to various boxes and caskets which were his no more. What if he tried them, one after another, until—?

Again the day dawned. It was Sunday morning. He thought of Eastbury,—thought of the quiet sleepers in the little cottage,—thought of the grey light falling softly on the old church tower, and creeping along to the green mounds and white headstones beneath. And he wished bitterly and passionately that his head were lying low under the mossy turf, instead of tossing restlessly on the pillow. Alas, Archie! Those who are not fit to live, are never fit to die. He came down to a late breakfast, and found Martin, as *before*, just about to set off for church.

"I meant to have gone with you, Willis," he said, confusedly, "but I did not sleep well; and I have a violent headache." Martin looked earnestly at the haggard face, and saw that the headache was no idle excuse.

"If you will take my advice, Clive," he answered kindly, "you will try to rest yourself this morning. Perhaps you may be able to go out this evening."

"I hope so," Archie replied. "I shall go and lie down on my bed after breakfast."

Then Martin went his way, and presently the church-bells ceased chiming. The house was very still; the landlady and her little daughter had gone to church, and the maid was busy in the kitchen. To the last day of his life Archie would remember the unbroken quiet of that Sunday morning.

He walked softly upstairs and entered Martin's room. As he stood looking about him, he was struck with the neat-

ness of all the arrangements; nothing was out of place, no clothes were scattered carelessly here and there. A large black box stood in one corner, with the initials M. W. studded in brass nails upon the lid. Probably it had once done duty as Martin's school-trunk. Above it hung a set of bookshelves made by Willis himself, and many choice volumes were to be seen upon them; for he loved reading. Over the chest of drawers was a water-colour drawing of a beautiful country-house. Dark trees arose behind it; and in front was a wide lawn and terrace, bright with flowers. It was a charming picture, evidently executed by a master-hand.

He closed the door noiselessly, and began his investigations. The Russian leather desk was nowhere to be seen, and his first proceeding was to open the drawers. Two of these were locked; he produced his keys, and was successful in *finding the right one at first*. There, laid





A CRIME.

upon a neatly-folded coat, was the well-worn brown case.

His fingers trembled as he touched it. He paused and listened—looking nervously around him, as if the very walls had eyes, and were gazing sternly on his evil deed. He glanced at the window; it was opened a little way, and a breath of soft air drifted in, for those autumn days were mild and calm. He caught a glimpse of the blue sky and the pure white cloud-flakes, and yet he was not turned from his wicked purpose.

One by one he cautiously tried the small keys in his bunch. They were eight in number. Seven failed, but the eighth achieved his design; it turned smoothly in the lock, and in a few seconds the contents of poor Martin's desk were exposed to his view.

He was growing bolder now. His heart throbbed less violently, and his hands were steadier. He lifted out the papers very carefully, and came at length to an



open envelope which contained something wrapped up in tissue. But that "something" proved to be utterly worthless; only a tress of fair silky hair and a little cluster of dried violets. What could Martin want with such trifles, he wondered?

Another envelope met his sight; and this too was unsealed. Here at last was what he sought, for it contained four five-pound Bank of England notes; it was the very sum that he required. He hesitated,—the baseness of his conduct was terrible to contemplate. If he did this thing, could he ever respect himself again? And yet, if he did it not, what would become of him?

Was there no fear of discovery? He did not believe that Martin would think him capable of so foul a deed; but then he had asked for the loan of twenty pounds, and that was sufficient to awaken suspicion. But he intended to return *the sum* as soon as possible; he would

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inclose it anonymously to Willis,—his friend should be no loser in the end.

He reasoned and acted like a desperate man. It was a fearful risk, but he resolved to brave it. He took out the notes, replaced the empty envelope, and arranged all the papers exactly as he had found them. Then he locked the desk, put it again into the drawer, and turned the key upon it. And so the crime was committed, and he left the room — a thief.

Martin returned from church, full of kindly anxiety for his friend. Archie trembled to see him go up to his chamber; but the day passed on, and it was evident that he had not discovered his loss. After tea, the two clerks attended evening service, and Clive walked homewards, leaning on the arm of the companion whom he had so deeply wronged. He was wont to say, long afterwards, that the very street through which they passed became hateful to him from that time. He could never enter it

without shuddering at the recollection of his guilt.

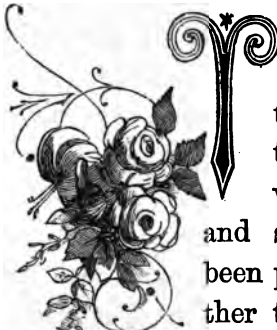
On the following day, he gave the stolen notes to Arnold Huntlie, and received a formal receipt. Arnold never asked how he had obtained them; and he understood from Archie's look and manner that their intimacy was at an end.





## CHAPTER V.

### ILLNESS.


A large, ornate decorative initial 'V' on the left side of the text, intertwined with a cluster of roses and leaves.

THE woods around Eastbury had taken the mellow October tints, and the days were growing shorter and shorter. Edith had been persuaded by her mother to leave the pupils to her in the afternoons, and go daily to practise on the organ in St. Fabian's church. She was making rapid progress ; good Mr. Kelly was very proud of his pupil, and had begun to talk of the time when she might fill his post.

He was an aged man, and the damps and chills of old St. Fabian's increased his rheumatism ; he scarcely thought that he could fulfil his duties during another

winter without assistance. Edith, he said, should become his sub-organist, and then she might eventually aspire to take his place.

She was thinking of the past and the future as she bent her steps towards the church on a certain Thursday afternoon. She remembered how they had first come to Eastbury, knowing not what was before them, in their sore perplexity and distress. And then the clouds had gradually cleared away,—the little school prospered, Archie was doing well in London, and she was actually realizing her own most cherished hopes. Had not the Father of the fatherless cared indeed for her and for the other dear ones? In all her ways she had striven humbly to acknowledge Him,—seeking His blessing even upon the most trifling things of her daily life; and He had directed her, according to His ancient promise. She had ceased to regret the luxurious home of other years; the cottage *had become* a home to her in the deepest,



sweetest sense of the word. For God was with them in their humble dwelling; and she had learned that His presence is oftener found under the lowly roofs of the poor than within the halls of the rich. Thus musing, she entered at the wicket gate, and passed into the quiet churchyard. Showers of sere leaves—amber and russet and scarlet—strewed the foot-worn way, and were sprinkled over the soft grass. The gravestones, some freshly white, and many others overgrown with grey lichen and tiny tufts of velvet moss, were bathed in the afternoon sunshine. A low wind sighed through the bending branches above her head, and brought a faint perfume of late roses. She reached the low arched portal of the church, and paused awhile on the threshold to let her glance linger on the fair scene outside.

Then she climbed the dark stairs leading to the organ-loft, and took her seat upon the high stool, waiting for the little boy who acted as bellows-blower. He came

pattering up the staircase with all speed, for he was one of Edith's Sunday scholars, and loved to wait upon his teacher. Presently the rich music poured forth, echoing through the stern Norman arches, and breaking the deep stillness of the empty church. She played on unweariedly, until the red light stealing through the west window grew duller, and the effigies of knight and lady sleeping on their marble tombs in the side aisles, could scarcely be distinguished in the grey gloom. Remembering that the little bellows-blower might be tired, if she was not, she struck the final chords of one of her favourite pieces, and then started to find that somebody was standing at her elbow. It was Mr. Benson.

"I am sorry to have alarmed you, Miss Clive," he said, gravely.

The serious tone surprised her. Mr. Benson was naturally a lively old gentleman, who usually greeted her with all the freedom of a privileged friend. She could *not* see his face distinctly, for the shadows

were fast gathering around them, but his voice sounded strangely in her ears.

“What is the matter?” she asked, breathlessly, as she turned herself towards him.

“I came here, my dear, because I knew I should find you alone. Your brother is ill,—very ill; and you or your mother must go to him.”

“Archie ill! O Mr. Benson, how did you hear this?”

“I have just received a letter from a fellow-clerk of his,—the young man to whom my nephew introduced him.”

“Ah! you mean Mr. Willis, who lodges with him.”

“Yes. He writes to tell me that Archie has a fever, and is delirious. He cries out continually for his mother and sister, and Willis begged me to break the sad news to them. I did not like to carry the tidings to Mrs. Clive; you are younger and stronger, my dear.”

“You have done wisely, Mr. Benson.”




said Edith, growing suddenly calm. "I will go home to mamma at once, and we will both start for London without delay."

She quietly locked the organ and put the key into her pocket, took up her roll of music and followed her friend downstairs. He watched her with deep sympathy, knowing that it must cost her a painful effort to effectually conquer her emotion. But Edith was not thinking of herself; her heart was full of anxiety for her mother, and she was considering how she should break the bad news to her.

They found Mrs. Clive sitting at her needlework in the cottage parlour, the little scholars having taken their departure. She looked up brightly at their entrance.

"You have practised late this afternoon, Edith," said she, "but the tea is ready for you. Ah! Mr. Benson, how do you do? Have you been listening to my daughter's playing?"

Edith came forward and threw her arms *around* her mother's neck.



“Mamma,” she said, gently, “dear Archie isn’t quite well ; and Mr. Benson thinks we had better go to him.”

Poor Mrs. Clive trembled from head to foot, and sank back helplessly in her chair. She had suffered much sorrow in the course of her life, and her strength was enfeebled by past troubles. But Edith’s courage and energy did not desert her for a moment.

“Archie has a good friend in Mr. Willis, mamma,” she continued, speaking cheerfully ; “but we must start off to him at once, you know. I will go and put a few things together, and Mr. Benson will make you a cup of tea. You must take something before you leave home.”


The kind old man aided her by soothing Mrs. Clive. He succeeded so well that the poor mother recovered her composure, and dressed herself for the journey more calmly than could have been expected. And a sad and anxious journey it was.

They found that Archie had indeed been

in good hands. Martin was a devoted nurse, carrying out the doctor's injunctions to the very letter; and the good landlady had done her part, watching over her sick lodger as if he had been her son. Archie's illness proved not to be so serious as all had feared; his delirium soon passed away, and he was able to recognise his mother and sister. Yet as the days wore on, and his strength gradually returned, it became evident to those around him that some heavy burden was pressing upon his mind..

Mrs. Clive remained in Islington, and Edith went back to Eastbury to attend to the school. The weather was bleak and cold, winter was drawing nigh, and Archie sat silently by his bedroom fire hour after hour. He replied to all his mother's anxious questions with assurances that he should soon be well; and she began at length to believe that his depression was merely the result of bodily weakness.

"Go back to Eastbury, dear mother,"



he said; "Edith needs your presence there, far more than I do here. In a few days I shall be strong enough to resume my work; and think of poor Edie, overwhelmed with school duties! Indeed, you must go, dear mother."

So Mrs. Clive was prevailed upon to leave him.

He breathed more freely when she was gone. It was intolerable to feel that he—her only son—was a thief. It was intolerable to look on her gentle face, and fancy the change that would pass over it, did she but know the truth.

One afternoon, when it was dull and grey, and the rain pattered heavily upon the window-panes, Archie sat bending over the fire, his elbows resting on his knees, and his eyes fixed intently upon the glowing embers. All the shame and degradation of his position lay before him now; he saw his great sin in its hideous blackness and ingratitude. Not one word had Willis spoken of his loss, but his ceaseless care

and kindness had indeed heaped coals of fire upon Archie's head.

The door opened softly, and Martin himself entered.

"You are almost in the dark," he said, cheerfully. "Shall I light the candles, Clive?"

"Not yet, thank you," Archie replied. "Mrs. Taylor will be bringing my tea presently. Until it comes, I prefer sitting in the fire-light."

Martin drew a chair to the other side of the hearth, and sat down to keep him company.





## CHAPTER VI.

### THE OLD DESK.



I HAD a letter from my sister this morning," said Archie, abruptly. "She asked me to thank you again, Willis, for all your kindness to me."

"Ah, Clive! I had a sister once," exclaimed Martin, suddenly turning towards his companion. "I haven't told you anything about my early home, because I feared lest I should bore you with my personal affairs. But when I saw your sister, she reminded me so much of my poor Ada, that I cannot help speaking about the past."

"Edith is a good girl," said Archie, huskily.

"I am sure of that. Ada was about Miss Clive's age when she died. Our mother was taken from us while we were children, and we lived constantly in each other's society. You shall see the picture of our home, Archie; it hangs in my bedroom."

Archie remembered it only too well.

"My poor father got into difficulties," Martin went on; "and our pretty home was sold. We became very poor; my father died, and my dear Ada—" He paused, and covered his face with his hands.

"She was always a fragile little thing," he continued; "and she seemed to fade away out of life. I have no portrait of her, but I have kept a lock of her fair hair, and a little bunch of violets that she gathered in our old garden;—that's all."

Archie thought of the relics he had deemed so worthless—those priceless treasures which his careless touch had profaned—and his agony was greater than *he could bear*.

“My poor father left many debts unsettled,” resumed Willis, after a pause. “I cannot hope to pay them all; but there is one—I scarcely know how to tell you, Clive. He borrowed three hundred pounds of a distant relation, not a rich man by any means; and he never repaid the sum. His friend died, leaving a wife and six young children in actual poverty. I am scraping and saving to raise the whole amount for them. By dint of strict economy I have contrived to send them nearly one hundred; and—”

“Don’t go on!” groaned Archie, stretching out his hands imploringly. “I stole that twenty pounds from your desk, Martin; I took it to pay Huntlie. Oh, what a wretch I am!”

Willis looked at him in some alarm. “Archie, my dear boy,” he said, kindly, “you are still weak and ill, and are not quite yourself. The money is safely locked in my desk. I put it there myself more than a fortnight ago.”



"No, Martin; it is not there. I stole it while you were gone to church. You think my brain is wandering. Well, fetch your desk, and you will find out what a rascal I am."

Still incredulous, Martin obeyed the strange request. He had never opened his desk since the day when he had deposited the notes therein. He had very few friends, and seldom wrote letters.

Archie shuddered at the sight of that Russian-leather writing-case, and gloomily watched while his friend turned over its contents. There was the empty envelope; Willis took it up with a perplexed look, as if he could not believe the evidence of his senses.

"I opened it with my keys," said Archie, turning very white. "I'll pay back the money somehow, Willis; never fear. But I shall still be a thief, you know,—as bad and worse than any of the pickpockets and burglars who are sent to gaol. Oh *my poor mother* and Edith!"

He arose suddenly from his seat, and before Martin could catch him, he staggered and fell. The room was a small one, and in falling he came violently into contact with the round table which stood near his fireside chair. It was laden with sundry articles, and also with that old brass-bound desk which Mrs. Clive had furnished for her son. Down came desk, table, and all, with a loud crash; but Martin thought only of Archie.

Archie, however, was unhurt. He had been seized with giddiness, but was speedily brought to himself. Martin soothed him, gave him a restorative, and then assured him that the sad story of his crime should never be disclosed.

"If God forgive you, Archie, and if I forgive you too," he said, "surely you need not despair."

Mrs. Taylor came running upstairs to ask what had happened. But Martin contrived to send her away, and began to pick up the scattered things.

"This poor old desk!" he exclaimed; "it is literally broken to pieces. I thought it was too strong to be injured by a fall."

"It was made a long time ago," Archie replied.

"And here are some very old papers, yellow with age," said Willis, taking up a small roll.

"Old papers!" repeated his companion, indifferently. "Ah! perhaps my mother left them there." And he held out his hand for them.

Martin gave him the roll, and went on with his task. But in the next minute he was interrupted by a cry which made him start to his feet.

"Martin! Martin! here are some old Bank of England notes! They must have been left in the desk by Uncle Tom. And here's a letter."

It was even so. There was a false bottom to the old desk, and there the sailor had kept his money. The letter was from *a comrade* who had paid him a debt of

long standing; and the notes amounted to one hundred and fifty pounds.


“What a fool I have been,” mused Archie. “I despised Uncle Tom’s desk, because it was old and clumsy; and I scorned Martin because he was homely and shy. And yet Martin and the old desk have proved to be my two best friends.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Little did Uncle Tom know how useful that forgotten money of his was to prove to one of his descendants. In sailor fashion he had stowed the notes away in a safe place until he should have need of them. But his wants were very few, and his last illness came upon him so suddenly that he had no time to settle his simple affairs. So that when Mrs. Clive’s parents took possession of his effects, they knew nothing of the hiding-place in the old desk. There the bank-notes remained, to be found at the very moment when they were most urgently required.

If this discovery had been made some months earlier, the sailor's hoard might have been squandered by Archie at the gaming-table, or wasted in some of Huntlie's sinful pleasures. But there is One whose "never-failing providence ordereth all things, both in heaven and earth," and He was keeping watch over the poor erring lad. Not until Archie had become unfeignedly penitent, and had frankly confessed his crime, was the money brought to light. If the old desk had been broken a little sooner, the youth would probably have restored the stolen sum without owning the theft. And then the necessary ordeal of humiliation would have been spared him, and he might, perhaps, have grown haughty and self-confident again. But the Divine love is always tempered with godly wisdom; and the everlasting Father will not omit the needful discipline.

In speaking of an event like this, people *are wont to call it a "special providence."*



But many young folk are sorely puzzled by this phrase, and would gladly understand it more clearly. The Lord is always doing wondrous things around us, but we see only a few of them. And when He opens our eyes to behold His marvellous works, then it is a special providence. He gives us the power to see His mercy, and to comprehend a little of the mighty love which is ever busy with our lives, shaping and arranging them for us. So that a special providence is like a sudden rift in the clouds, letting out the glory of the veiled sun.

How often we are on the brink of some deadly peril without knowing it! Thousands of times God has saved our lives or preserved our bodies from harm, when we have not even suspected our danger. Another step in this course would have brought us within the grasp of death; another movement in that direction would have plunged the soul into the darkness of fatal error. But His unseen Hand is

always near, protecting and restraining us, and controlling every act of our existence.

Very humbly did Archie pay back the twenty pounds which he had taken from Martin's writing-case; and very earnestly did he urge his friend to make use of the rest of Uncle Tom's money. But this Willis steadfastly refused to do.

"You must send it to your mother, Archie," he said. "There were sundry expenses incurred during your illness, and I am sure that this sum will be a comfort to her. And now, dear old boy, you must promise to let the little affair of the twenty pounds remain a secret between ourselves. Do not tell your own people anything about it."

After some moments of reflection, Archie felt convinced that Martin was right. Mrs. Clive was already enfeebled by the heavy trials of her past life; it was better therefore that her son's guilty deed *should be kept from her knowledge.*

She would have grieved over his fall as only mothers can grieve; and the recollection of it would have cast a shadow over the rest of her days.

But Martin's delicacy and kindness were almost more than Archie could bear. And when he remembered his former contempt for this faithful friend, he was humbled to the very dust. How weak and silly he had been, and how strong and wise Willis had proved himself to be! From that day he clung to this good and true-hearted companion, seeking his counsel, following his example, and telling him of all the troubles and perplexities which came in his way.

He was surprised to find that Martin's attainments far exceeded his own. Of the two, Archie had received the better education, for Willis had been taken from school at an early age, owing to his father's misfortunes. But Martin had not suffered his faculties to rust; he had spent his spare time in reading profitable



books and in continuing his interrupted studies. And in a little while Archie became ashamed of the soiled volumes in yellow covers which Huntlie had introduced to his notice; he grew tired of the foolish stories which had neither freshness nor truth to recommend them. And then the two young men read together wholesome works, which filled their minds with satisfying food, and helped to make them good husbands and good fathers in the years that followed.

In their quiet home Mrs. Clive and Edith rejoiced over the manifest improvement in Archie. There was a new tone in his letters; and if he no longer wrote in the old rollicking spirits, he never pained them now by the light remarks which bordered on profanity, nor by the self-sufficiency that once gave them such uneasiness. He was humble and grave and tender; and then, too, he was far more manly than they had ever known him before.

*Uncle Tom's money was indeed a great*

boon to Mrs. Clive. The little school was prospering; Edith was fast gaining a reputation as a teacher of music; and their prospects were gradually growing brighter and



THE NEW PIANO.


brighter: and it was arranged between the mother and son that a part of the sailor's hoard should be expended for Edith's benefit. So one day, when the

young girl returned weary and jaded from her round of music-lessons, she beheld a beautiful new piano standing in the corner of the little parlour.

"Mamma," she cried in amazement, "what does this mean?"

"It means, dear, that I have sent away the old worn-out instrument which was hired to do duty, and have substituted this. It is bought with Uncle Tom's money, my child; and if he could speak to us now, I am sure he would tell us that it could not be better employed. You have worked steadily and patiently, Edith, and you deserve to have a reward."

Tears of happiness filled the girl's eyes as she sat down and ran her fingers lightly over the ivory keys. This gift was the very thing that she had long desired in secret; but not for the world would she have betrayed that desire to her mother. She had kept the wish to herself, scarcely venturing to hope that it would ever be realised. And now the long hidden con-



tents of that despised old desk had given her this great delight.

It soon became an established custom for Martin and Archie to spend their holidays together. Less fortunate in this respect than his friend, Willis was alone in the world,—his nearest relations were dead, and there was no hospitable house open to him when he left the London lodgings. He had been too shy and reserved to make intimate companions of his fellow-clerks; nor were their tastes and pursuits exactly in accordance with his own. The chiefs of the office respected him for his good sense and steadfast integrity, but they never thought of inviting the lonely young man to their homes. They spoke of him among themselves as “one who would make his own way in the world, and do well for himself;” but they never dreamed that his heart ached for lack of that sympathy and friendship which are so precious to the young.

Mrs. Clive’s little cottage was a very

paradise to Martin. The motherly kindness of his hostess soon put his shyness to flight, and Edith exerted herself to the utmost to entertain her brother's friend. Unlike Archie, Edith was not easily deceived by appearances. She recognised a pure gem, even in a rugged setting, and valued it as it deserved. With all his outward recommendations, Huntlie would never have won her favour as Martin did. She was quick in detecting falseness, and invariably despised it.

Very willingly she gave up her own little chamber to accommodate Martin; and although he was quite unconscious of this sacrifice, he always thought of that apartment as the pleasantest and most peaceful resting-place that he had ever known. Often in his London lodgings he recalled the aspect of that pretty little room, with its draperies of snow-white dimity, the illuminated texts upon its walls, and the sweet perfume of dried lavender that pervaded it, reminding him of the chambers

in his own old country home. From the small window he looked out upon a fair picture,—the grey walls and square tower of St. Fabian's church, and the quiet graveyard with its grassy mounds and shadowy path under the trees. There the bright dew twinkled in the morning sunshine, and the stainless light kissed the mossy headstones before the busy world was awake.

And sometimes in the soft summer dawn he caught a glimpse of Edith herself, taking her way into the churchyard, followed by her little bellows-blower. Then, when he had set the window open, he could hear the faint sweet sound of solemn music, and knew that Edith was making good use of those early hours,—practising on the organ, and training herself diligently for the post which she hoped some day to fill.

Little did the young girl know the earnest prayers and blessings that followed her along that quiet church-path; little

did she guess how deep was Martin's sympathy with her honest efforts to do her part bravely in the great battle of life.

At length the good old organist of St. Fabian's resigned his place, and Edith stepped into it. It was a joyful day for all who knew and loved her (and they were many) when it was known that the appointment was hers. Her sunny cheerfulness under privations, and her un-failing perseverance, had attracted the notice of those who had the power to help her, and they were not slow in giving her encouragement. The old dread of bitter poverty had passed away, and mother and daughter might now venture to indulge in many little luxuries which they had long denied themselves. Mrs. Clive's face lost its anxious sorrowful look, and Edith went about her daily duties as happy as a bird.

It was an August evening. The sun had just gone down, leaving a flood of *mellow amber* light above the distant hills

and the soft grass in the churchyard was wet with heavy dew. It was Saturday, and Edith had been practising with the choir; the men and boys had just gone off to their homes, and the young organist returned to the cottage.

These were Archie's holidays, and, as usual, he and Martin were spending them together in Mrs. Clive's peaceful little house. The parlour window was open, and as Edith approached, she could hear the sharp sound of hammer-strokes.

"What can they be doing?" she said to herself as she knocked at the door.

The two young men sat together at the table, and between them were the severed portions of Uncle Tom's old desk. Already, Martin, who was clever in using tools, had succeeded in restoring the fragments into their former shape. He was very intent upon his work, taking infinite care and pains, and Archie looked on with a thoughtful face.

"Do you think," asked Edith, smiling



"that the old desk will ever be of any use again?"

"Yes," answered her brother, speaking more gravely than usual, "I believe it will. And if in future years I should have a home of my own, Edith, it shall occupy a place in my best room."

"Well," said she, still smiling, and wondering at his earnestness, "the old desk furnished me with my beautiful piano, and I shall always regard it with gratitude."

"And I too," remarked Archie. The two friends exchanged glances, and Martin laid down his hammer.

"I think," he said in his quiet tone, "that we cannot do wrong in keeping things which remind us of God's mercies. You know the Psalmist says, 'Forget not all His benefits.' But sometimes our memories fail us, and we need some visible link to connect us with the past."

Archie's lip quivered, as he turned his *face towards* the window, and looked out

upon the soft evening sky. And the words of that old prayer, which we all utter too often without realising its meaning, rose silently from the depths of his contrite heart at that moment :

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.”





## CHAPTER VII.

### AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.




**F**IVE years came and went ; but few changes had taken place in the daily lives of our friends. Archie's salary had increased ; and his employers had learned to regard him with confidence and esteem. He had sown his wild oats early, as the saying is, and was now settling down into a steady and respectable manhood. Ah, those wild oats ; what a terrible crop they produce sometimes ; and how hard it is to clear them away from the ground, and prepare it for the good seed ! Sow folly and vice and idleness in your youth, and you will reap bitterness *and* sickness and poverty in your old age.

“To speak in rural phrase,” said William Cowper, in a letter to a young friend, “this is your sowing-time, and the sheaves you look for can never be yours, unless you make that use of it. The colour of our whole life is generally such as the three or four first years in which we are our own masters make it. Then it is that we may be said to shape our own destiny, and to treasure up for ourselves a series of future successes or disappointments.” Mark these words, “*The three or four first years in which we are our own masters.*” That is the very time to which a lad looks forward with such eager longing; the season when he may have the control of himself, and feel that he is free from restraint. He forgets then, when parents and guardians cease to exercise any authority over him, there is yet another Master whom he *must* serve, if he desires the eternal welfare of his soul.

The service of that Master is “perfect freedom.” But there is one who is ever

on the watch for unfaithful servants, and whose purpose is to make them his own. He will make them slaves, and "captives" to his wicked will. He will delight them at first with false pleasures and sensual joys : he will say to each, "soul, take thine ease ; eat, drink, and be merry." And then he will prove himself a hard and cruel task-master, whose wages are misery and death.

Archie and Martin kept up the old custom of spending their holidays at Eastbury. The day-school was given up, but Edith's time was fully occupied with her duties as organist, and in giving music lessons to her numerous pupils. Mrs. Clive might now take her rest, for her children were prospering, and they loved to work for her. The cottage was improved and beautified ; and its inmates would not willingly have exchanged it for a grander residence. It was their home,—lowly and unpretending indeed ; but full of pleasant memories, and endeared to them by holy associations.



"Some day," Archie had once remarked, "I must establish you and Edie in a larger house, mother."

"No, my boy;" Mrs. Clive answered gently, "we should not be so happy in a larger house."

"Don't think of such a thing, dear Archie," said Edith. "We love our little cottage better than a palace. In this parlour we have laid our plans, and talked over all our hopes and fears. Outside the window is the Virginia creeper which I planted when we first came here to live, and I wanted to make the place as pretty as possible, without spending any money. Well, Mr. Benson gave me the plant; and when I put it into the ground, I wished that like Jonah's gourd, it could come to perfection in a single night! Months went on; and it grew and flourished. And now, when the September sun has turned its foliage into burning crimson; many a passer-by pauses to look at it and admire it. It has

crept up to the casement of my bedroom, and sometimes when the autumn sunshine streams through its red leaves, I am reminded of the rich coloured light that comes through the east window of the old church yonder. As to my chamber, Archie,—that is a sacred spot, you know.”

“Why do you call it a sacred spot, Edie?”

“Because I have prayed there so often,” she answered, lowering her voice; “and because I have thanked God there too. I reckon any place sacred from which the voice of prayer and praise has ascended to heaven. And I don’t think I have ever gone into an empty house, Archie, without thinking of the unwritten stories that its chambers have held. The silent walls tell no tales, but they have witnessed many secret struggles and deep rejoicings.”

“Well, well, I won’t say anything about a larger house if you are so reluctant to leave this cottage; and the truth is, that *I have grown* very fond of it myself.”

So the five years glided away and found Edith and her mother still occupants of the little dwelling on the outskirts of the town. There was one who loved the cottage as well as Edith loved it, and who counted the hours passed under its roof as the happiest in his life; and that one was Martin Willis.

Martin was not of the number of those who are always taking holidays. He thought that a few days at Christmas, and a month in August or September, were quite enough for a young man who had to make his own way in the world. He believed that if God has given us work to do, He means us to do it steadily and conscientiously; not to desert our lawful employment on the lightest pretence, and go gadding here and there in search of recreation. He was right when he said that there was a great deal of nonsense talked about requiring change of air and scene. Doubtless these changes are very requisite and proper sometimes; but habits



of restlessness are easy to form and hard to break, and love of change is a very different thing to the need thereof. Archie had learned to imitate his once-despised friend; and he too was content to plod quietly on, without pining for too many breaks in the routine of his occupation. But when their holidays *did* come, they enjoyed them so thoroughly and heartily, that many a listless and sated pleasure-seeker might have envied them.

It was a Sunday in August, and evening service was drawing to a close. The day had been sultry and still, and the doors of the old church were set wide open, that any stray breeze might wander in. A shower had fallen, sprinkling the grassy mounds with crystal beads and starry jasmine petals, and the air was cooled and freshened. The sunset lights broke gloriously through the rain-clouds, flinging dazzling golden bars across the wet graveyard, and striking upon the grey walls in *sudden* gleams of brightness. A man in

shabby garments drew near the gate, and stood there, lounging with folded arms under the wide-spreading shade of an old yew.

He was a young man, although at a first glance he appeared much older than he really was. He wore a very old hat slouched over his brows, and had a soiled and torn coat which had at one time been black and white. The rest of his attire was threadbare and dusty, his figure was tall and lean, his whole aspect poverty-stricken and miserable. Presently, as a sweet breath of air wandered towards him, bringing the scent of the jasmine that grew over the church porch, he pushed back the hat from his forehead with a heavy sigh. It might have been that the fragrance reminded him of a past that was brighter and fairer than his present weary lot. It was evident that his condition was neither happy nor prosperous; one could read the traces of suffering in his sharpened features and

hollow eyes. He had been handsome once, but now his face was sallow and pinched as if with hunger and disease, and wore a look of utter hopelessness and gloom.

The sun sank lower, the golden bars faded away from the graves, but the evening sky was still filled with pure calm light. Just then, a rich wave of sound from the organ came rolling up the church path, and the man's pale lips quivered as it broke over him. Perhaps in his better days he had been fond of sacred music; the strain seemed to affect him powerfully, and after a moment's hesitation he walked slowly to the door of the church. Removing his shabby hat, he entered, standing just within the building and keeping as much as possible in the shade. Yet he was not unnoticed, for a little charity-school girl in a neat grey dress and white tippet stepped up and gave him an open *hymn-book*, pointing out carefully the

hymn that was about to be sung. His hand trembled as he took the book, and bent his head to thank the child.

Then the congregation stood up, and that full burst of holy song, always grand and solemn, brought the tears into his eyes,—

“Now the solemn shadows darken,  
And the daylight slowly dies ;  
Blessèd Saviour, Thou wilt hearken  
When Thy people’s prayers arise :  
Jesus, Jesus,  
Look on us with loving eyes.

Some are tried with doubts and dangers ;  
Some have found their hearts grow cold ;  
Some are aliens now, and strangers  
To the faith they loved of old :  
Jesus, Jesus,  
Bring them back into the fold.

Some have never loved Thee truly ;  
Some their feeble love bewail ;  
Longing, Lord, to praise Thee duly,  
Finding flesh and spirit fail :  
Jesus, Jesus,  
Let Thy grace with these prevail.

Some in conflict sore have striven  
With temptation fierce and strong ;

Lord, to them let strength be given,  
If the battle should be long :  
Jesus, Jesus,  
Change their mourning into song.

By Thy passion in the garden ;  
By Thine anguish on the tree ;  
By that precious gift of pardon  
Won for us, alone by Thee :  
Jesus, Jesus,  
Set the sin-bound captives free.

In our weakness Thou art strongest,  
Bid us trust Thine arm of might ;  
When the gloomy hours are longest,  
Jacob's Star is clear and bright :  
Jesus, Jesus,  
Turn our darkness into light."

The last sweet notes died away into silence, and were followed by the benediction. The stranger knelt on the floor and covered his face with his hands. How long ago was it since he had heard those soothing words : "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son, *Jesus Christ* our Lord : and the blessing

of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you and remain with you always" ?

There are many of us who hear that blessing uttered Sunday after Sunday, without entering into the fulness of its meaning. We do not pray as we ought while those words are spoken, that the peace of God may indeed descend upon our hearts, and fill us with the knowledge of Him who died that we might live. But the wretched man who knelt there in his sore distress realized what that blessing meant more fully than he had ever done before. "If," he thought, "that peace were in truth shed abroad in my soul, I should taste a purer kind of happiness than I ever knew in my prosperous days. Would that the blessing of God Almighty might come down like rain upon parched lands, softening the hard dry soil with precious moisture, until it brings forth fruits meet for repentance!"

Rising from his knees, he wiped away

his tears and stole out of the church. But the churchyard was so still and sweet, that he was tempted to linger there. And so he stood in the shadow of the yew, watching the worshippers as they took their departure; sighing sometimes as a young husband, well-clad and happy-looking, passed by with a fair wife leaning on his arm, or a bright boy (such as he once was) glanced up inquisitively into his haggard face, wondering, perhaps, what had brought the shabby stranger there. At last the old men and women who belonged to the almshouses came hobbling out by twos and threes; then the choristers; then the grey-headed rector and his curate; and, finally, four persons, at sight of whom he started, and involuntarily drew back farther into the shade.

Archie Clive, brisk and smiling, was supporting his mother on his arm; and it was easy to see by her look of calm content that her heart was at rest about *her son*. Behind them walked a beautiful

girl, and beside her was Martin Willis. Time had dealt kindly with him. He was no longer the shy, ungainly lad of other days, but a straight-forward, self-reliant gentleman, who—

“Looks the whole world in the face,  
For he owes not any man.”

Those who came into contact with him saw truth and intelligence in his rugged features, and preferred him to many who surpassed him in personal beauty. Just at that moment, when the stranger's glance fell upon him, Martin was looking his best. He was happy in Edith's company, and that happiness shone out of his eyes and sounded in the very tones of his voice.

“What a sweet evening,” Edith was saying; “it seems as if the peace of God were resting on our earth to-night. And yet, Martin, one knows that there are heart-aches and miseries under these calm skies. As the hymn says,—



“ ‘Some are tried with doubts and dangers ;  
Some have found their hearts grow cold ;  
Some are aliens now, and strangers  
To the faith they loved of old.’ ”

“ But we can always pray for them,”  
said Martin,—

“ ‘Jesus, Jesus,  
Bring them back into the fold.’ ”

“ There are more answers to prayer than we dream of, Edith. And if we prayed to God to alleviate the woes of mankind, instead of spending our breath in bewailing them, I think it would be all the better for this world of ours.”

“ True,” returned Edith ; “ men ought always to pray, and not to faint ; and our petitions should be made for others as well as for ourselves.”

The words reached the ears of the unsuspected listener, and went thrilling through his heart.

“ If *they* pray for sinners like me,” he mused, “ perhaps there is hope. Somewhere in the Book it is written that ‘ the

effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' ”

Unconsciously he made a slight movement as the pair went by. The dark yew-boughs rustled over his head, shaking down some drops of cool dew upon his weary face. Martin's quick ears caught the sound, and he turned and looked steadfastly at the stranger.

Perhaps he thought that he was lurking there for no good purpose. Perhaps something in the man's aspect, seen even in that dim light, was familiar to him. Folks were wont to say of Martin, that he never forgot a figure or a face; he had been known to recognise people when recognition had seemed almost an impossibility.

But if he fancied that he had seen the stranger before, he kept the matter to himself, and quietly crossed the road to Mrs. Clive's cottage.

“I must leave you for a few minutes, Edith,” he said to his companion; and she entered the house without him.

Meanwhile, the stranger stood motionless under the yew, while the lights in the church were extinguished one by one. And then the old sexton came shuffling out, closing the massive door behind him



RECOGNITION OF AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

with a sharp sound, and turning the key in the lock. He did not come near the spot where the stranger stood, but *tramped along* a little path tangled with

trailing ivy and heaped with fallen leaves, to his dwelling behind the church.

Mechanically the lonely man put his hand into the pocket of his threadbare waistcoat, to ascertain if the price of a night's lodging were there. But he withdrew it with a sigh.

"I am brought very low," he murmured. "Well, I can pass the night in the church porch; I might lie in a worse place. As to the morrow, it must take care of itself."

"Arnold Huntlie," said a voice at his side.

"Who are you?" he asked, in a startled tone, shrinking back under the tree again.

"Is it possible that you don't remember me?" The voice was kind and friendly; there was nothing to be feared from the speaker.

"I do remember you," replied Huntlie, more calmly; "you are Martin Willis. But how did you recognise me?"

"That I can hardly tell you," answered

the other. "As I was leaving the church, I saw you standing here, and felt compelled to give you a searching look; somehow I had a conviction that you were known to me, and then I came back to convince myself of the fact."

"Well, I am not a very desirable acquaintance," said Arnold, bitterly.

"Things have gone wrong with you," rejoined Martin, "but they may be set right; and I shall not shun an old acquaintance because he is not prosperous."

"You are a strange fellow, Willis; you would have nothing to say to me in my better days."

"Never mind the past," said the other cheerfully. "Sometimes there are truer friends to be found in adversity than in prosperity."

"Ah, there are many proverbs to prove the reverse!"

"Where are you going to sleep to-night?" asked Martin, suddenly changing *the subject*.

"In the church porch," replied Arnold, bringing the words out with a jerk.

"That must not be. You shall have a good supper and a comfortable bed to rest in, or I'll know the reason why."

"I shall do well enough," returned Arnold, sullenly.

"Nonsense, Huntlie; a damp stone porch is not a wholesome bed-chamber. There is a respectable inn at a short distance off, and I am going to take you there."

There was a moment's pause. The twilight had deepened, one or two stars twinkled faintly in the soft dusky sky, and a couple of bats which had slept the day out in the old church tower came wheeling through the dewy air. A low wind whispered through the boughs of the yew and crept sighing over the graves, but no other sound broke the hush until Arnold put his hands before his face and burst out sobbing like a child.

Martin stood quietly by his side, suffer-

ing the painful emotion to have its way. And when the poor fellow turned to him with a few broken words of apology for his weakness, he simply took him by the arm and led him out into the open road.

“You will be all the better for a night’s rest,” he said, gently. “And to-morrow, Huntlie, I shall come and see you after breakfast.”

He conducted his unresisting companion along a pleasant lane which opened out upon a small common. Here stood the inn of which he had spoken, a roomy old-fashioned white house, where the coaches used to stop in by-gone days, and where rioting and drunkenness were unknown. The doors and windows were still open, and on the threshold stood the honest landlord, smoking his pipe and enjoying the freshness of the evening.

Taking him aside, Martin whispered a few words in his ear, and Huntlie found himself waited upon with the utmost *respect and attention*. Mr. Willis had spent

many a night under the roof of the Golden Fleece, and was highly esteemed by its worthy master and mistress.

So for the first time for many many weeks Arnold sat down to a substantial meal in the old inn-parlour, and went to rest afterwards in a clean and airy chamber. These were luxuries which the poor wanderer had scarcely hoped to enjoy again; the once foppish and fastidious Huntlie had been faring worse than a pauper, and sleeping in the company of tramps and gipsies. Such were the straits into which his evil courses had led him.

After wishing him good-night, Martin took his way back to Mrs. Clive's cottage, musing gravely as he retraced his steps along the quiet road.

"But for the grace of God," he thought, "I might have been as Huntlie now is,—wretched, degraded, and alone in the world. Not my own strength, but His unfailing care 'ordered my goings' and kept my feet in the narrow way. Ah! that



narrow way ; how rugged it seems at first, when one compares it with the broad and easy road of self-indulgence ! Yet as one travels on, what sweet flowers grow by the way-side ; the feet grow accustomed to the rough ground, and the heart ceases to pine after forbidden pleasures. A lowly life of hard work is the happiest life, after all. For God Himself has blessed it, and will bless it until the working days are done."

He reached the cottage, overgrown now with Edith's Virginia creeper ; and Edith herself met him at the door.

"Where have you been ?" she asked. "Mamma and Archie and I were wondering what had become of you."

"I will give an account of myself," he answered, smiling.





## CHAPTER VIII.



### CONCLUSION.

ARCHIE," said Martin, as they sat down to supper, "did you notice a man standing under the old yew as we were passing out of the churchyard?"

"I think I did," Archie replied. "Yes; I remember seeing him. He was a tramp, I suppose."

"That man was Arnold Huntlie."

"Impossible!" cried Archie, almost starting from his seat; "you mistake, Martin."

"There can be no mistake," rejoined his friend, quietly, "for I have only just parted with him, and have seen him

safely housed at the Golden Fleece. He is evidently in a sad condition, Archie."

"But when we saw him last" (here Archie's voice faltered a little) "he was as gay and prosperous as ever. How is it that he has sunk so low?"

"That I cannot say; he has not told me his history yet. He left our office, you remember, a few months after your intimacy with him had ceased?"

"Yes; I remember it all,—I am not likely to forget that time;" and Archie spoke so solemnly, that his mother and sister looked at him in surprise. "He boasted very much about the new situation he had obtained, but we never saw him afterwards."

"I have promised to go to see him to-morrow morning," continued Martin. "At first he was unwilling to accept any favour from me, but I overcame his scruples. He was about to pass the night in the church porch."

*Little more was said until the meal was*

ended; and then, when they were all preparing for a quiet hour of social talk and sacred music, before retiring to rest, Archie said in a grave voice,—

“Mother, I have something to tell you. It has been kept a secret between Martin and myself for nearly six years, but I think you ought to hear it now.”

Edith, who had seated herself at the piano, turned round upon the music-stool and looked earnestly and anxiously from her brother to Martin. The latter reassured her by a smile, and seeing that Mrs. Clive was startled, he added cheerfully,—

“I agree with Archie that it is the best to have no concealments, but I don’t think it is necessary for him to tell the whole of the story; it can be summed up in a few words. There were one hundred and fifty pounds found in his uncle’s old desk, and he gave you one hundred and thirty, reserving twenty pounds to pay a private debt of his own.”

"The money was really Archie's," said Mrs. Clive, looking relieved. "I had given him the desk, and of course its unsuspected contents belonged to him."

"Mother," interposed Archie, "Martin would fain hide my guilt and his own goodness: but I will speak out at last: you shall hear all."

And then he told the tale of his weakness and sin from beginning to end.

Mrs. Clive's tears flowed fast during the recital; but, when it was finished, she arose, and going to her son, put her arms round his neck. Her silent kiss said far more than words could have done. And in the meanwhile Edith was speaking to Willis.

"Oh, Martin," she said softly, "you have indeed been a true friend to our Archie; we can never repay your kindness."

"Hush, Edith," he answered, taking her hand, "you over-estimate me; and you *have already* done a thousand times more

for me than I ever did for Archie. Have you not admitted me into your home-circle, almost making me forget the sorrows and losses of my past life? You don't know how many gloomy thoughts you have charmed away. But for you and your mother, I think I should have been a moody fellow enough. I owe Archie a vast debt of gratitude for having brought me here."

"Well; don't let us talk any more of debts or debtors," said Edith, more lightly. "And, Archie dear, I think the story of Uncle Tom's old desk ought to be printed in a book. Is nobody clever enough to write it out? It would make a better tale than many that I have read."

They sang a hymn before separating for the night. But long after Mrs. Clive and her daughter were asleep, Martin and Archie sat talking about Huntlie, and planning how they could best serve him.

True to his promise, Martin took his way to the Golden Fleece on the following morning. The landlord met him at the

door with a very grave face, which spoke plainly enough of bad news.

"The poor gentleman is very ill, sir," said he; "he hasn't touched a morsel of breakfast, and my missus thinks he's going to have a fever."

It was too true. Huntlie sat shivering on the sofa in the inn parlour, and looked up at Martin with languid eyes.

"My head swims," he said, feebly; "don't you think you had better send me to a hospital, Willis? These good people won't like to keep a sick man in their house."

"Leave yourself in my hands," returned Martin, kindly. "Lie down on the couch, and I will send for a doctor."

But Huntlie was not destined to go to the hospital. His illness was not of an infectious sort; it was a low nervous fever, brought on by insufficient food and rest. As it increased, he became delirious, and rambled on about the wretched life he had *been leading*, until Martin's heart ached to

hear him, and the good landlady was melted to tears. And then his senses returned, and he became conscious that a friend was beside him. By slow degrees he communicated the whole of his history to Martin, beginning from the period when he had left his situation in the office of Messrs. Gibbon & Neale. He had then become a commercial traveller, but had proved himself unfit to be trusted with money, and was ignominiously dismissed. So he had gone on, from bad to worse; and at last, leaving London in disgust, he had travelled into the country. His small stock of money was soon exhausted, and then he had wandered hither and thither, seeking work and finding none.

Archie gladly visited his old companion in his sickness, and insisted on sharing with Martin the expenses of the illness. Their holiday was nearly expired, but Huntlie showed no signs of returning strength, and the doctor grew doubtful as to his ultimate recovery.



"Willis," said the poor fellow one evening when his kind friend was sitting by his bedside, "I know that I am dying, and I should like to see my only living relative again. Mrs. Neale was my mother's own sister; and although I have been a sad trouble and disgrace, perhaps my aunt would not refuse to come to me now."

The Neales were not hard-hearted people; and when they heard from Martin that their nephew was sick unto death, they came to see him. They repaid Willis and Clive the money that had been willingly expended on poor Arnold, and thanked them again and again for all that they had done.

"Now that he is dying," said Mrs. Neale, sorrowfully, "I forget all his misdoings, and remember only the bright face and winning ways of my poor sister's son; but if she had lived, I think he would have broken her heart."

*"Perhaps, if she had lived, he might*

have been different," remarked Archie—thinking of the influence which a mother's prayers and counsels had had upon him.

The two friends went back to their posts in London; but Edith did not forget poor Arnold in his loneliness, and she and her mother went often to see him. The grey-headed rector visited him too, and many of the good folk of Eastbury sent him dainties to tempt his appetite, as well as other tokens of goodwill. But no kindness could prolong that waning life, and it soon became evident to all that his days were numbered.

Had he any hope of entering into a better world when he should have passed away from this? It was long before any such hope was vouchsafed to him,—long before he dared to believe that guilt like his could indeed be washed in the precious blood of Christ.

Fully aware of the magnitude of his own sin, he was wholly unable to comprehend the vastness of the Saviour's love. But

at last the light came, the darkness of doubt and despair fled before the rays of the Sun of righteousness, and his end was peace.

He was buried in the churchyard at Eastbury, under the shadow of that old yew-tree where Martin had found him standing in his poverty and wretchedness on that memorable Sunday evening.

\* \* \* \*

Uncle Tom's old desk is now standing on a table in the best room of Archie's house. For Archie has a house of his own by this time, and a little lad of five years old often lisps out questions concerning that mysterious desk on which papa sets such a high value. He will know its history by-and-by when he is old enough, but not yet.

Martin and Edith are married, and Mrs. Clive has forsaken her little cottage at Eastbury to share their home in London. The pretty dwelling is now tenanted by a *childless* widow, who gladly receives its

old inmates as boarders during the autumn months ; and Edith is heartily welcomed by all her old friends.

“I think, Edie,” said Martin to his wife, one Sunday evening when they were leaving the old church together : “I think, when I look at poor Arnold Huntlie’s grave, that it is as vivid a reminder of the past as even Archie’s old desk.”





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